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## **Profiling of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan: a qualitative study conducted in Refugee Camps in Pakistan**

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### **Abstract**

Profiling of Afghan Refugees is now a major dimension in determining the relationship between the people and the socioeconomic impacts that arise as a result of profiling. This study delineates the psychological changes in the perspectives of Afghan Refugees that is a result of the disintegration between the communities. This study will help the Non-Governmental Organizations (UNCHR) and the domestic policy makers to redesign and polish policies regarding the socioeconomic situation of Afghan Refugees.

**Key Words:** Refugees Profiling, Psychological changes, Disintegration, and Policies

### **1.1 Introduction**

Afghan refugees have been living from more than four decades in different parts of Pakistan. The correlation between Afghan refugees and Afghan conflict can be explained with the help of refugee-war nexus which states refugees are a direct product of war (Kampf, 2019). Historically Afghan refugees have been used as tool of war in the shape of proxies. The scale of war is identified by the ratio of Refugees. The stay of Afghan refugees was always conditioned by the war scenario in Afghanistan and their treatment have always been based on the political relations between the two countries. Considering four decades, it seems to be a huge time now for the Refugees who have been unable to identify themselves for the attainment of legal rights like the right to own properties, the rights to open bank accounts, the rights to job etc.

Along with the vast socioeconomic impacts, profiling is also impacting the Psychological behaviors of Afghan Refugees residing in Pakistan. The major cause of disintegration of Afghan Refugees from the rest of Pakistani community is the lack of ownership to the fundamental rights. There seems to be a rapid increase in the impact of disintegration among the Afghan refugees since when there has been a trend of raising slogans for the Refugees by the Pakistani community due to the increasing influence i.e., “Kala ba zay” (When are you going) or by the slogan of “Oh Majara” (Oh Refugee). The discriminatory policies towards the Afghan refugees have built different perspective within Afghan refugees; Pakistan has never

had good intentions towards the refugees either they have been used as war tool or thrown away once the mission has been accomplished.

At the same time the opposing narrative stays with the Pakistani community that the Afghans can never be your good friends and they are “Namak Haram” (Betrayer). These perspectives created gap and hatred within the community. The relations between the two nations have always been hard to understand throughout the history. The constructed image of Afghanistan from the Pakistani’s perspective including journalists, think tanks, state functionaries and academics have presumed Afghanistan’s government linkage with India while from Afghan’s perspective Pakistan’s agency ISI has always been named as an interventionist in Afghanistan. The difference in dynamics increased the gap between two nations and at large the primary effect of that has to be faced by the Afghan refugees.

## **1.2. Research Objectives**

1. To study the socioeconomic status of Afghan refugees living in Pakistan.
2. To research on how profiling has changed the psychological behavior of the refugees.
3. To research and identify how hard it is to live in the host country with the absence of refugees’ rights.
4. To find the root causes and effects of disintegration of the Afghan refugees from other communities living in Pakistan.
5. To provide the descriptive data for future researchers and policy makers that would help them make best decisions for Afghan refugees by knowing the insights.

## **1.3. Research Method**

### **1.3.1. Study design**

A qualitative study based on in-depth interviews was conducted among 25 young Afghan refugees, aged 18-40. These Refugees lived in Pakistan for over four decades, are Afghan nationals, have Afghan Proof of Registration (POR) cards, employed at various fields of life, from a peanut seller to a businessman, from a student to house wife, in refugee camps in Pakistan.

### **1.3.2. Research design**

Based on the literature reviews interview guides were developed for conducting the in- depth interviews.

### **1.3.3. Data collection**

A combination of primary and secondary data analysis is used for extracting the data i.e., taking the few points from the already existed work for the literature review and the newly conducted in depth interviews from the Afghan refugees living in different parts of Pakistan.

## **Section 2**

## **2.1. Literature Review**

### **2.1.1. Brief History of Afghan Refugees**

Fleeing from the motherland and taking refugees in the other country is not a simple task. People migrate and shift to other regions in order to attain socioeconomic benefits or to opt other career opportunities but for the Afghans the only concerning factor has been the security. Migration was the only option left to save lives from the generations' long wars. Around three million registered and unregistered Afghans are living in Pakistan (Khan, Afghan Refugee, 2017). Initially, during the first wave of influx, refugees were welcomed when soviet invaded Afghanistan, but the sooner the agenda was accomplished they have been considered as a major socioeconomic burden. In protracted conflict refugees are the victims of the slogan, "burden" i.e., they are perceived as socioeconomic burden on the host country. (Kreibaum, 2016). In most of the terrorist attacks that happened in Pakistan, Afghan Refugee camps have been targeted by several security agencies. Through several search operations the peaceful coexistence of Afghan refugees took a sharp turn after the 2014 deadliest attack on Army Public School in Peshawar, which caused 145, dead of young school children. (Walsh, 2014). The pressure towards Afghans grew stronger and led to the coercive re-partition of Afghan refugees from Pakistan (Khan, 2017 b).

### **2.1.2. Socioeconomic Conditions of Afghan Refugees**

Pakistan has improved and revamped its strategy towards Afghan refugees in terms of several policies launched between 2017 and 2022 (Mielke & Etzold, 2022). The policy was aimed at improving border security between the countries, with Pakistan fencing 90% of the line. The fences are designed to make both formal and informal crossings difficult. However, the system is termed "porous" as many Afghan refugees still make their way through the border (Mielke & Etzold, 2022). A key aspect of socioeconomic analysis involves developing an understanding of the demographics of the target audience. Pakistan's 2020 statistics show that there are approximately 3 million Afghans residing in Pakistan. Among this population, only 1.4 million refugees have accredited Proof of Registration (POR) certificates, whereas around 800,000 refugees hold an Afghan Citizen Card (ACC) (Zehra & Usmani, 2021). The remaining number of refugees are living without any type of documentation, increasing the general hysteria of disintegration (Abbas, 2020). The POR card allotted by the government is aligned with the standards set out by the UNHCR for refugee integration within society (Khan & Hanif, 2019). This includes allowing freedom of movement for both POR and ACC holders across the country. These documented refugees can also travel outside of their camp without any risk of apprehension from the authorities. Undocumented refugees also have the freedom, but they are also at the constant risk of interrogation from authorities (Anwar et al., 2021). As for social conditions and treatment by Pakistani citizens, the refugee movement has created a wave of competition between locals and migrants. This competition spans from basic needs like food, water, and electricity to even more advanced societal needs like jobs, land, and property (Kavian et al., 2020).

### **2.1.3. Profiling in the Refugee Context**

Profiling is an excellent instrument for bolstering the asylum procedure throughout all of its components. Profiling is instantly put at the center of refugee protection by inquiring whoever the asylum applicants are. Profiling sets the integration operation on the correct course from the start by seeking for important, accurate, and trustworthy information about genuine refugees from the instant they make their refugee application, and structuring this material in a well- defined but also easily available manner (Hoffman et al., 2019). Profiling is frequently the outcome of collaboration with other organizations and may be used to develop ties. The ability to share data will place the refugee office in a good situation when establishing collaborations with receiving groups, non-governmental organizations, and other migratory agencies (Gozzoli & Leo, 2020). While profiling is an effective process in developed countries, in Pakistan, social profiling has taken a serious toll on Afghan refugees. This toll defines facing issues with locals in terms of acceptance and conducting day-to-day measures. Afghan refugees and migrants who sought protection in industrialized nations but now live in Pakistan confront the same problem. Despite the fact that many have applied for asylum, the reviewing speed of their petitions remains slow (Cheesman, 2022). Afghan reporters, for example, who took safety in Pakistan during the Taliban's control, have been demanding that the assessment of their refugee claims in advanced economies be expedited. Given the large volume of applications, UNHCR has cautioned that the procedure may take some time. This has resulted in a variety of issues for Afghan refugees, including social disintegration. For instance, 10% of Afghan refugees who reside in Hazara, an area where sunni-shia conflicts are on the rise, face similar repercussions and issues (Fedrigo et al., 2022).

### **2.1.4. Profiling and its Psychological Impacts in Refugees**

Many migrants have experienced potentially stressful situations and report high levels of emotional suffering. Unfortunately, the degree of difficulties with mental health varies widely among refugees. Some refugees benefit from intra- and interpersonal variables. Forced travel, engagement to potentially distressing experiences, and relocation in strange areas are all important factors for refugee mental health difficulties (Liddell et al., 2019). Considering how all of these refugees come from hostile environment, it is natural for them to skip profiling. However, negative social profiling is a concept that explains the role of society in terms of accepting new members. This acceptance is difficult because it means sharing resources, spaces, and cultures with other members (Newnham et al., 2019). In case of non-acceptance, refugees can suffer from a range of different issues. Since this research is focused on the social aspects, mental health impacts are the most appropriate choice of study. These health impacts include different issues like depression and anxiety etc. Mental health impacts can also turn into permanent personality disorders, making individuals a misfit in the society (Jongedijk et al., 2020). These issues coupled with a traumatic past can severely damage the community. The essential goal of profiling is to sustain a viable, transparent, and accepting picture of refugees. This is to ensure easy acceptance and/or integration within different communities of the society (Aragona et al., 2020).

### **2.1.5. Causes of Disintegration within the Society**

To compete with the inflow of Afghan refugees, Pakistan's parliament approved a number of steps to control the issue. Sheikh Rashid, the Federal Minister of Interior, said that the Chaman and Torkham crossings (the two largest entry sites connecting Afghanistan and Pakistan) were accessible and also that Pakistan will indeed provide Afghans with 21-day transit permits (Saeedullah et al., 2021). Pakistan's government also revealed plans to house Afghan refugees in specific regions at specific places, as well as the projected number of refugees they intend to house in these areas. This approach against new Afghan immigrants highlights the anxieties of a state stressed by the expense of sheltering refugees as well as worried about global defense. According to human rights organizations, Afghans are frequently used as scapegoats by the administration and elements in Pakistan's struggle against economic insecurity and extremism. Even as humanitarian crisis across the border worsens, Afghans are seeking safety in Pakistan (Fayyaz, 2020).

### **2.1.6. Synopsis and Future Dynamics**

A tense relationship has been witnessed between Afghanistan and Pakistan from decades but the future dynamics relies on five major aspects i.e., sovereignty concerns, security interests, geopolitical dynamics, cross-border ties, and connectivity and trade (Easterly, 2021). The ongoing discrimination and profiling of Afghan Refugees in different parts of Pakistan has increased, mostly in the province of Sindh, which will surely have negative impacts on the psychological behavior of Afghans as well as on the image of Pakistan. "Sindh is not an international orphanage," "and we will not allow more Afghans to live here." (Palijo, 2021).

## **Section 3**

### **3.1. Research Findings**

This section of the research focuses on analyzing the findings of the interviews conducted with different Afghan refugees currently residing in Pakistan. The findings are analyzed using the content analysis approach, with a focus on direct interview responses. This chapter will effectively contribute within the discussion section and help to address the refugee situation in Pakistan. Afghans faced terrible circumstances when the Pakistani government chose to dismantle major refugee camps owing to serious security risks. Because of the lack of basic services, equipment, and business benefits in Afghanistan, the majority of refugee families opted to live in Pakistan's metropolitan regions. As a result, the urbanization of Afghan refugees as well as their freedom of movement in local regions placed them nearer to local citizens, making interaction unavoidable.

For example, the case of Mr. Gul, an interview respondent in this research points out some of his difficulties. Mr. Gul Rehan, from the 7th semester at the University of Lahore, studies international relations there. He belongs to Kunduz, Afghanistan. He has been living in Pakistan for a long time, since his ancestors shifted there 40 years ago at the time of war. Gul Rehan mentions that he is not getting all his rights; he does have the POR card, but he is not getting all the rights as a registered citizen

of Pakistan. The respondent claims there were times when he could not even travel using the POR card because the authorities did not accept his card. According to Gul, there are a large number of Afghan refugees residing in Pakistan.

He also mentions he has been a victim of prejudice many times, especially when he was travelling. The data also suggest that he has suffered prejudice at checkpoints on several occasions. We were even jailed at times due to our refugee status. He cites two sorts of prejudice: discrimination at the top level by the government and discrimination at the bottom level by civilians. He has been the target of both. He provides the example of the recent cricket match in Dubai, when individuals suffered severe prejudice. He has even observed rallies against Afghan refugees, as a result of which the government implemented plans to return the migrants to Afghanistan.

There have been various slogans against the refugees i.e., "refugees when will you go back". Aside from these slogans, the majority of people blame Afghan refugees for terrorist incidents in Pakistan. According to him, Afghan refugees are not integrated into Pakistan's other populations. Afghan refugees have been living in refugee camps for decades, so how can we integrate if we don't live together? According to Gul Rehan, refugees play a significant role in Pakistan's economy since they have invested all of their fortune in Pakistan after being moved.

The interview also shows Mr. Gul recalling about 2014, when refugees were being turned back due to policy changes, many businessmen migrated and collected their claims, severely affecting the economy. Profiling has also had a physiological influence on me, particularly when I experienced prejudice; we have no option, we cannot go back, but it hurts to be treated poorly and to live in a condition of disintegration. The issue of cross-border travel, in my opinion, should be eliminated. Through the use of media, habits and attitudes should be improved. The research findings show Mr. Gul believes Pakistan has the potential and needs to improve upon different measures to facilitate refugees. He believes that to eliminate the differences that create disintegration, the positive sides should be defined. Pakistan's government, like that of the West, should have an excellent refugee policy. The rule of law must be implemented, and policies must be improved.

According to the figures, the majority of Afghans were raised in Pakistan and faced sociocultural, economic, and religious uniformity throughout their retreat, which strengthened their social bonds with the local people. This is evident from Mr. Zahid's responses, the second respondent for this research paper. Zahid ullah Zahid is a seventh-semester international relations student at the University of Lahore. He has lived in Pakistan for about 40 years. He highlights a huge number of bias incidents in Pakistan, particularly in KPK. He argues that when they disintegrate that leads to prejudice, it not only disrupts the influence of the host country but also has an impact on the country's economy. He argues that there ought to be programs that share the traditions of the countries and integrate individuals, as well as good policies that are actively executed.

The findings also include responses from another international relation student studying in the University. The student is from the Banu region and his family has been residing there for more than 40 years. The data suggest that, following the APS

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attack in Peshawar, authorities began to pursue refugees more aggressively. The police initially targeted every Afghan. They detained the Afghans throughout every checkpoint and questioned them for no reason.

Even if refugees had POR cards, operators in the transport industry were not permitted to carry Afghan passengers. He claims that we would want to live in harmony with other cultures, but we are not given the opportunity. Government policies influence social behavior as well. The findings show that the respondent believes that all refugees should be treated as equals in the country. He believes that the Pakistani government should launch more awareness and education programs that can change the narrative of people. This narrative should be designed with the essence of peaceful coexistence and fighting wrong doers.

### **3.2. Research Discussion**

Findings from the interview response shows different types of issues faced by Afghan refugees living in Pakistan. These changes have specifically occurred after Pakistan made changes towards refugees following a wave of terror attacks within the country. This research aims to understand the role of social profiling caused by these policy changes. This is because these changes have created a negative narrative that surrounds Afghan people in Pakistan. However, after strengthening its borders, Pakistan still encountered several undocumented refugees entering into the country after the Taliban takeover of Kabul in 2022. Social profiling, if applied exclusively in Pakistan for the Afghan refugees will help to explain their existing situation. Whenever refugees enter any country, they tend to create scarcity and competition. This competition lies for even the most basic needs from food and water to advanced needs like setting up businesses and gaining education. Since Pakistan is also battling an economic crisis, this influx of refugees has created a natural hatred within locals. This hatred is fueled by different policies that are still being questioned by both refugee and human right commissions in Pakistan.

The interview analysis has pointed out several types of instances that show severe disintegration of Afghan refugees in the country. These instances include lack of proper housing facilities, societal acceptance, and lack of business opportunities. For refugees, their mental health is already on the brink because of battling post-traumatic stress. Both primary and secondary research has pointed towards a positive correlation between social profiling and mental health issues. These issues range from anxiety, depression, panic attacks, and identity crisis. Migrants and refugees' psychological problems should indeed be met through applying manageable and inclusive awareness and precautionary programs, and providing clinical recognition, therapy, and rehabilitation. Migrants and refugees make valuable contributions to community. According to research results, many Afghan refugees face several types of socio- economic issues such as financial hardship, prejudice, intolerance.

The findings have also pointed towards reasons behind this disintegration or non-acceptance from the society on different levels. On the primary level, the non-acceptance for Afghan refugees comes from state-level policies, implemented after

encountering terror attacks. These policies also include increased blocking of Pakistani borders, delaying Afghan refugee crossings. This step creates a divide between the locals and portrays the refugees as forced migrants. However, while Pakistan has provided POR cards for refugees, the process is slow and needs technology-based improvements. These improvements include addition of professionals who can examine applications and provide immediate responses. The second major reason for social profiling in Pakistan is due to low economic resources. Afghans residing in Pakistan, are dissatisfied with how they are treated at the border and within the nation.

## **Section 4**

### **4.1. Conclusion**

In summation, this paper has effectively presented a comprehensive qualitative analysis of social profiling of Afghan refugees in Pakistan. This social profiling defines the action of perceiving others based on their social status. Since encountering several types of terror attacks in the past, Pakistan has made different changes to its refugee management policies. These changes include a redefined border protection system and increased scrutiny over refugee applications. Naturally, these policies have created an effect that has trickled down towards the society and results in non-acceptance of Afghan refugees by the locals. Apart from social levels, Afghan refugees are also facing different types of issues when it comes to basic needs. A lot of refugees live in different areas of Pakistan and without proper healthcare facilities. The findings show this type of behaviour and non-acceptance has different types of negative impacts on the refugees, especially considering their mental and physical health. The research believes there is more room towards this topic. This room includes exploring options that can help the government launch different types of inclusion-based policies.

### **4.1. Recommendations**

The recommendation section is designed to present different types of steps acting as primary suggestions for policy upgrades. The integration of refugees through effective policy-making is important for Pakistan. This is because this integration will help the country stabilize migrants and provide them with a chance to serve Pakistan as a resident.

#### **Pakistan needs a law that is outlined to resolve the uncertainty of Afghan refugee status in Pakistan.**

The absence of law is a visible space that requires immediate attention. Despite worldwide praise for Pakistan's generosity to Afghan refugees for almost four decades, Pakistan could draw from its history and expand the spectrum of long-term alternatives available to Afghan refugees.

#### **Pakistan's focus should be on implementing integration instead of repatriation**

Pakistan's proposed refugee policy focuses exclusively on departure from the country. A clear federal migration strategy that not just meets the requirements of



Profiling of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan: a qualitative study conducted in Refugee Camps in Pakistan overseas Pakistanis but also addresses the issues and demands of immigrants residing in Pakistan is critical.

**Refugee children born in Pakistan should have a legal status by birth**

This is also a key point considering 65% of the Afghan refugee population is currently under 25 and holds the potential to settle down in the country. This potential also includes contributing towards nation-building activities and economic development.

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